

José Miguel Martínez Carrión (ed), *El Nivel de Vida en la España Rural, Siglos XVIII-XX*. Salamanca: Universidad de Alicante, 2002. Pp. 724, maps. ISBN: 84 7908 668 8. Hardcover 30 euros.

Over the last decade historians have shown that Spanish agriculture experienced considerable changes in the century or so prior to the 1936/9 Civil War, the

period which, despite its title, this book is concerned with. By the 1930s the farm population was falling rapidly, mechanisation and irrigation spreading to new areas, and productivity increasing. One of the interests of this book, as the editor notes, is therefore to see the impact of these changes on living standards, and whether rural inequality increased or decreased over the period.

The book is centred around four major themes: changes in real wages; consumption and household survival strategies; stature and infant mortality; and education and child labour. It concludes with a 50-page appendix of wage series for different regions between 1700 and 1936. Among the 12 chapters, there are a number of fine essays, but most suffer from being too long. Another limitation is that too few of the authors have reflected, or perhaps even read, the other contributions, despite the book originating from a congress. Certainly the editor has tried to pull together the various themes, but readers are required to do considerable work themselves to obtain an overall picture of change.

All the authors are able to show improvements in living standards, especially for the early twentieth century. For example, real wages increased by fifty per cent from about 1850–1930 in Navarra (pp. 231–2), mortality for children under ten years in central Spain halved to just over 200 per 1000 (p. 403), and the height of rural recruits in south-east Spain increased from about 160 cm to 165 cm (p. 427). Yet more interesting is what the authors have to say about distribution between the different groups of rural society, and the cyclical changes over time. Thus the three variables just mentioned all suggest a worsening of living conditions between about 1840 and 1870, before improvements began during the ‘agrarian crisis’ of the late nineteenth century. This point could have been pursued in greater depth, as there are few references either to changes in land-to-labour ratios, or their consequences for living standards. Indeed, several authors appear to automatically equate a rise in land rents with falling living standards for farmers, despite the growing opportunities provided by urban markets. Tables by Lana for Navarra, and Domínguez for northern Spain suggest that the significant increase in land ownership reflects improved living standards, as much as changes in real wages.

Despite the shortcomings, this book is likely to be required reading for those interested in long-run changes in living standards in Spain and southern Europe. With one exception, there are no weak essays, and all have involved long hours of archival research. The authors are also fully aware of the limitations of the statistical indices they are using. Furthermore a good coverage of rural Spain has been achieved, with the exception of the *jornaleros* in the southern *latifundios*. A careful, but heavy pruning of the papers, and a greater attempt by most of the authors to relate their results to other contributions in the book, might produce a volume which would deserve translating into English for a wider audience.

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